Economics and Subjectivities of Wellbeing in Rural Zambia[1]

Sarah White and Viviana Ramirez

[A] Introduction

As described in chapter one, the call to go 'beyond economics' is central to the wellbeing agenda. One dimension of this is to go 'beyond GDP' in measuring national progress. Another is the extended debate on the theme of 'does money make us happy?' which has animated the new field of 'happiness economics' (Graham 2011). While the tenor of that debate is strongly positivist, defining itself in terms of 'what we know'[2], it can also be read against the grain as a discourse on Western cultures of wellbeing, using statistics to debate the relative importance of income, wealth, inequality, human rights, health, employment and family relationships to 'good lives' and 'good societies'. Continuing the well-worn pattern of 'modernity' seeking to know itself in contrast to 'tradition' (Grossberg 1996), this questioning about wellbeing has also looked to 'other cultures' for inspiration, as less materialist, more spiritual, more holistic. *Buen vivir* and allied approaches have inspired significant mobilisation for cultural and political rights in Latin America. However, their celebration in the West also indicates the particular place of indigenous worldviews as a cultural mirror for self-questioning Western modernity. But this is only one side of the picture. The contradictory dynamic within Western modernity is to generalise its own patterns of thought as universal (Mazrui 2001). For current discourses of wellbeing and their preoccupation with subjective experience and 'happiness', informed by the psychological and affective 'turn' across

the social sciences (e.g. Craib 1994, Moore 2007, Kahnemann 2012), this means the export of a psychological subject, projected onto the peoples of the world.

This chapter presents mixed method research in Chiawa rural Zambia in which people resisted the attempt to render them psychological subjects, and instead foregrounded the economic in their representations of self. It begins with a brief discussion of the key terms, economics and subjectivity. It then describes the research design, location and methods. The following sections present a number of different vantage points which demonstrate the centrality of the economic to wellbeing. These begin with the emphasis people place on material sufficiency in their accounts of what wellbeing means to them. This is followed by statistical analysis, first of the relationship between subjective economic confidence and overall happiness, and second of the relationship between measures of objective economic status and subjective dimensions of wellbeing. This leads into further questioning of the form of association between economics and subjectivities, with qualitative data suggesting a more internal relationship of co-constitution than the external causative relationship usually envisaged by quantitative methods. Three snapshots are presented: the role of economic capacity in forging (male) gender identities; the emphasis on reciprocity and a *moral* economy; and the use of economics as an expressive idiom in speaking of the self.

[B] Economics and Subjectivities

The definition of the economy and the economic is a matter of major debate. Within economic anthropology the main divisions concern those who identify the economy in substantive terms, involving the social organisation of, for example, production, consumption and exchange, and those who see it in terms of a logic of decision-making, the 'rational' 'choice to allocate scarce resources to different possible ends.'

(Wilk and Cliggett 2007: 35). Amongst economists there is a further difference between those who accept that social norms, institutions and obligations influence behaviour and those who believe that these motivations are merely incidental to the 'rational', maximising motivation. In this chapter we adopt the first, descriptive approach, classifying as 'economic' any reference to work, production, wealth or assets, income, consumption, material provisioning and exchange of goods or services. While Chiawa operates within a market economy, norms of reciprocity have a powerful influence on behaviour and provide an important idiom for social exchange. Individual decisions are made at the interface of moral intuitions, social obligations and calculations of self-interest, sometimes, as shown below, quite explicitly so.

The emphasis on the subjective in contemporary constructions of wellbeing is paradoxically marked by a widespread failure to theorise subjectivity. Where such theorisation does appear, it is amongst the critics, rather than the advocates (e.g. Ahmed 2010). The mainstream subjective wellbeing (SWB) literature is extraordinarily naïve, assuming that people *know* their own thoughts and feelings, that they can abstract and generalise from these to assign an overall number, and that they are ready to give an accurate report to strangers. There is some admission that society and culture may have some effect on scores (e.g. Graham 2011, Diener and Suh 2000). However, the *subject* who is the author of these results remains unexplored, an abstracted point of cognition and affect such that even the individual's state of health is represented as an external factor whose correlation with happiness is a matter to be investigated (e.g. Graham 2011: 67).

The slimness and simplicity of the subject in the SWB literature is in marked contrast to the breadth and multiplicity emphasised in the literature on identity and subjectivity in feminist, sociological and cultural studies. The focus on subjectivities grew out of work on identity, which had built a critique of any claims that identity (often in the

context of gender and/or ethnicity) could be seen as naturally given or unitary (e.g. Hall and du Gay 1996). This led to talk of people identifying themselves through a process of identification(s) which are always multiple and relational, rather than fixed identities, complete in and of themselves. The notion of subjectivity combines an understanding of people becoming subjects *of* their lives, with the recognition that they are subject *to* powers and circumstances that are not of their choosing. The stress on multiple subjectivities recognises that there are many different ways in which people identify and experience themselves. But these 'ways' are not random, they are reflective of a particular place and history. Mama (1995: 89) provides a powerful statement of this, as she describes subjectivity as:

> constituted, socially and historically, out of collective experience. I theorise subjectivity not as a static or fixed entity but as a dynamic process during which individuals take up and change positions in discourses. I further propose that these discursive positions can be located in the collective history of the social group in question.

This renders the subject social, rather than psychological; fluid and complex, rather than stable and unitary. Like the psychological subject it is somewhat disembodied, discursive rather than corporeal. It does, nevertheless, provide a basis for exploring the range of ways in which people represent themselves, which we begin to explore in the later sections of the chapter. First, however, we explain the concept of wellbeing used in this study, the methods of research, and introduce the location in which it took place.

[A] Methodology and Research Design

[B] The Inner Wellbeing Approach

Inner wellbeing is a psychosocial approach which explores what people think and feel they can be and do. In some ways, therefore, it has conceptual affinities with

Sen's capability approach (see chapter one) although its methods are quite distinct. In the categories established in chapter one, its underlying model is relational wellbeing. It was developed through primary research in two rural communities, one in central India (Sarguja district, Chhattisgarh state) and one in Chiawa, Zambia, 2010-13. Unease with the fact that standard approaches to subjective wellbeing had been developed in such different contexts to those of our research, coupled with the wish to explore in a more substantive manner how people were thinking and feeling about their lives, led us to develop our own concept and methods of assessment.

Inner wellbeing comprises seven domains: economic confidence, agency and participation, social connections, close relationships, physical and mental health, competence and self-worth, values and meaning. These bring together dimensions identified as important in the psychological wellbeing literature (e.g. autonomy, competence and relatedness, Ryan and Deci 2000) and in the literature on empowerment and social development (e.g. Rowlands 1997). For example, one of the items in the social connections domain is, 'Do you know the kind of people who can help you get things done?' This reflects the fact that in many societies in the global south people's access to key resources depends on personal brokerage (e.g. Devine 2002), and the importance of social capital more broadly (Putnam and Leonardi 1994). Two previous research projects were particularly influential in developing the inner wellbeing approach. The first was Wellbeing in Developing Countries (WeD), which identified three interlinked dimensions of wellbeing: the material – what people have or do not have; the relational – how people relate to one another; and the subjective – what people think or feel (Gough and McGregor 2007; White 2010). The second was the Colombo-based Psycho-social Assessment of Development and Humanitarian Intervention (PADHI) and their 'social justice approach to wellbeing' (PADHI 2009). This provided five of the seven domains in the inner wellbeing model. To these were added two more (on close relationships and

values and meaning) which had been shown to be important in WeD and in a project on religion and wellbeing, respectively (Devine and White 2013).

Each of the domains is assessed through five questions for which answers are provided corresponding to a five-point scale. These items, and the domains themselves, were forged through an extensive process of reflection, grounding and piloting and statistical testing. The inner wellbeing model is represented by the star in Figure 5.1. The circle which encompasses the star indicates the broader environment within which people experience wellbeing. Although we had to 'fix' inner wellbeing as a set score for the purpose of assessment, we do not view it as something stable that people 'have'. Rather we see the experience of wellbeing as something that happens in interaction, between the domains, between people, and between people and the broader environment (see also White, Gaines and Jha 2014; White and Jha 2014a).

Figure 5.1: Inner wellbeing

[B] Methods

The research on which this paper is based took place in two rounds of four months' fieldwork in Chiawa, Zambia, August-November, 2010 and 2012. The main instrument was a survey, which combined objective (self-report) questions about livelihoods, education, health and social support with subjective questions about satisfaction and inner wellbeing. We talked to husbands and wives (interviewed separately) and women heading households. In almost all cases these women had previously been married and were single as a result of widowhood, desertion or divorce. Respondents were asked in all cases to speak as individuals, so for example their main source of livelihood should reflect their own activity, not the main income to the household as a whole. The field research was led by the project research officer (Shreya Jha) who was supported by a team of three local peer

researchers who acted as interpreters and undertook much of the survey work themselves. The project director (Sarah White) visited for shorter times, including all piloting at the beginning of each fieldwork period.

For statistical analysis we draw only on the second fieldwork period. This involved surveys with 370 people, including 52 women heading households. 358 of these respondents were also interviewed in 2010. In the qualitative analysis we draw on data from both fieldwork periods, comprising notes from 54 survey interviews and verbatim transcripts of 40 open-ended life history interviews and one focus group discussion.

Surveys were conducted in Goba, Nyanja or English language. If an international member of the research team was present they were translated into English simultaneously, otherwise they were undertaken solely in the language in which the interviewee was most comfortable. Responses were recorded on a survey form in English and inputted into Excel, then translated for analysis into SPSS. Qualitative interviews and the focus group discussion were either in English or translated simultaneously. We have coded and analysed qualitative data by hand and using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. All direct quotes are identified by type of respondent (MM = married man; MW = married woman; SW = single woman) with the respondent number. Where we quote at length from a particular individual, we give him or her a fictive name.

[B] Chiawa

Chiawa lies in Kafue district of Lusaka province. To the south and southeast Chiawa is flanked by two major rivers, the Kafue and the Zambezi; to the north by the Zambezi escarpment. To the southeast it borders Zimbabwe and to the east the

Lower Zambezi National Park. Chiawa was declared a Game Management Area in 1991.

Most of the population of 10,929 (Zambia census 2010) lives in villages along the line of the rivers. Local amenities are basic: a primary health centre, an agricultural extension office, a community development office, schools and churches. There is no public transport, so most people have to walk, cycle or rely on private pick-ups and small lorries which run along the main route providing transport to work or the ferry in the mornings and evenings. Chiawa has four primary schools and one (primary) community school plus two high schools. A single police station has very limited resources and a traditional court was not operational during our research. Most other official business requires people to travel to the district capital of Kafue, and for hospital care to the nearest town of Chirundu. In both cases this has meant crossing the river by ferry. The other significant government presence is the Zambia Wildlife Authority. Governance of Chiawa is in the hands of the Chieftainess, who appoints the headmen who lead each village.

Major economic activity is concentrated in large plantations or safari lodges which occupy most of the best land along the river. Farming remains a mainstay of village livelihoods, often in combination with other activities. In 2012 25 per cent of respondents stated farming as their main source of survival. The main implement remains the hoe and mechanised irrigation is rare – only 23 households report having a water pump. Shockingly, although 70 per cent of people reported planting maize in 2012, only half of them (37 per cent) managed to harvest any. This reflects the extremely precarious nature of local livelihoods, hit that year through a combination of drought and crop damage from wild animals. Asked how many months they were able to eat their own maize, only 29 per cent answered 10-12 months, 34 per cent saying 4-6 months, and 30 per cent 3 months or less. Almost 30 per cent of our respondents had gone hungry over the past 12 months, including 22

per cent of married men, 32 per cent of married women and 43 per cent of single women.

After farming, three other activities tie for next place as most common source of survival, each being reported by 9 per cent of respondents. The first is safari lodge employment, which involved 22 per cent of men but no women. The next, petty trading, has a markedly different gender profile, involving 21 per cent of women heading households, 12 per cent of married women and only 1 per cent of married men. Many of these enterprises are extremely marginal. The third is piecework, which comprises various kinds of casual labour, and shows no significant difference by gender/marital status. 4 per cent overall report commercial farm work as their mainstay. This was proportionately more common amongst women heading households (10 per cent).

Chiawa stands on the brink of change. Despite being only 70 miles from Lusaka, it has been relatively isolated with poor quality roads and a daytime only ferry across the Kafue river. In 2014, however, a new bridge was completed, and a new road is also being built. While the improved transport infrastructure has been eagerly awaited, it also carries dangers. Economic development so far has provided some benefit in the shape of jobs, but has also threatened local lives and livelihoods through the growing number of wild animals since it was declared a Game Management Area, and privatisation of the customary land on which local people depend. This has resulted in sporadic social and political protest over the past 20 years, but with little sign of positive action to protect local people's tenure. The fear is that the new road and bridge could raise local land values and accelerate dispossession, pushing local people out of agriculture and into increasingly marginal and precarious activities.

[A] Findings

[B] Economic sufficiency is a major preoccupation

Given the harsh conditions and material scarcity of village life in Chiawa, it is not surprising that economic sufficiency is the first thing that people mention when you ask about wellbeing. The following comment is typical:

> Most essential thing I want to say is that one must be able to have sufficient food for him and also his family (MM 13).

Many emphasised the importance of land and farming as the basis of their livelihood. For some this was everything. An elderly man put it like this:

> Wellbeing is all about if you have everything that you want, you are able to farm and harvest whatever is supposed to be harvested and also when things go according to plan and then even other people will also say 'I think he is wellbeing' (MM 28).

For others, though, farming was the basis around which other activities might take place. A school teacher talked about his hopes for retirement:

> Yes just buy a plot of a farm and just locate myself there. I can do some other things, but meanwhile I have the farm (MM 107).

A married woman in her thirties whose husband had worked in a safari lodge, explained:

> I think that is not only the money that makes a better life because even when you are in the home you don't fight and we are able maybe to farm, get a good harvest, get enough food even without money that would still be a good life (MW 54).

In fact, when asked about almost anything, the economic continually intruded. We had real difficulty finding questions for the self-worth domain in particular, as items that are commonly used in wellbeing surveys to gauge self-worth or levels of social trust were interpreted by respondents in economic terms. Asked if they had achieved what they had hoped to in life, people would speak about their limited means; asked if neighbours were helpful, people would say that they did not have the means to help; asked about harmony in the home, they would say how could there be harmony when they were worried about survival?

The most obvious interpretation of this is Maslow's (1954) 'hierarchy of needs' in which he saw physical and material needs as having to be met before social or psychological needs came into play. In contrast to this, however, it was not that people did not talk about other parts of their lives, including what Maslow classified as his highest category, of 'self-actualization needs'. Rather, the way they talked about them was more embodied, such that the material was intrinsically interwoven within these other dimensions.

[B] Economics and inner wellbeing: statistical analysis

In this section we present our quantitative analysis of the relationship between economic status and subjective dimensions of wellbeing within our sample. Fierce debates regarding the Easterlin paradox notwithstanding (see chapter one), there is now quite widespread agreement amongst economists about the general patterns of relationship between economic status and subjective wellbeing. Confirming Easterlin's (1974) initial observations, most agree that there is little change in happiness scores within a country as GDP rises over time (Graham 2011: 16). Graham (2011: 17) shows that those in OECD countries tend to report higher scores, but amongst countries with lower GDP there is no discernible relationship between

GDP and SWB. Stevenson and Wolfers (2008) argue against this, that there is a consistent relationship across countries between GDP and SWB. Within countries the picture is clearer. Most studies find that wealthier people report themselves as happier than do poorer people and there is a 'basic needs' threshold. For very poor people, the relationship between income and SWB is much stronger than it is for wealthier people (Graham 2011:17). In economists' terms, the marginal utility of income is seen to fall as incomes rise. Where income is seen to continue to have an effect on SWB amongst wealthier people, in seems to be relative income that matters (the level of my income compared with others around me) rather than the amount of income in absolute terms (e.g. McBride 2001).

Differences in findings reflect at least to some degree the use of different datasets, different techniques of analysis, and different measures of wellbeing (Graham 2011). Stevenson and Wolfers (2008), for example, employ the Gallup World Poll measure of life satisfaction, which is widely found to be the measure which correlates most strongly with income (Kahneman and Deaton 2010). It is also now recognised that life satisfaction measures in general correlate more closely with income, compared to measures of emotion or affect (Diener *et al.* 2010, Graham 2011). The way that SWB and happiness are used interchangeably, with either term being used to refer to empirical measures of life satisfaction or affect or a combination of the two, makes it difficult to get clarity.

In order to test the significance of economic dimensions in quantitative analysis of our dataset, we needed first to ensure that we had statistically robust measures for our wellbeing domains. This involved a procedure called Factor Analysis (FA) which tests whether people's responses to the items which we have assigned to each domain in fact behave in the systematic way we would expect them to, to show that they all correspond to the same underlying factor (or domain). The analysis validated six domains, with economic confidence emerging as the strongest, first

factor. The analysis validated four items for the economic confidence and social connections domains and three items for agency and participation, health, competence and self-worth, and values and meaning.[3] These items were thus used in calculating our domain scores.[4] They are shown in Table 5.1. We were not able to validate the close relationships domain. This reflects the difficulty we found in designing items which could track the quality of close relationships in a reliable way, given the strong social pressure to project family harmony (see also Jha and White, this volume). While we recognise the importance of close relationships to wellbeing, we have therefore had to exclude this domain from further analysis in this chapter.

Table 5.1: Items from Factor Analysis that measured six domains of inner wellbeing

Having produced reliable measures for the six domains, we then wanted to test the relationships between these and our single happiness question ('Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are these days?'), which is a standard subjective wellbeing measure. The way quantitative analyses such as correlations and regressions are generally used would envisage the relationship between the IWB model and SWB either in terms of determinants (IWB causes SWB, or SWB causes IWB) or components (IWB domains comprise elements of SWB). Our view is that these two approaches reflect distinct concepts and measures of wellbeing, but they are not entirely different. We therefore would expect some overlap between them and are interested in exploring the extent of this.[5]

The mean scores for the happiness item and the six inner domains are given in Table 5.2. These show that people scored happiness above average (3.5, when 3.0 would be the mid-point). The only other scores above the mid-point are those for health and self-worth.

Table 5.2: Descriptive statistics: happiness and IWB

We next wanted to assess the overlap between the IWB domains and the global happiness question though correlations analysis. This simply explores the strength of the association between the two measures of wellbeing, without any view as to whether there is a causal relationship between them, or if so, in what direction. Table 5.3 presents the coefficients. As expected, the results show that all IWB domains have a positive and significant linear association with happiness. The significance is strong at ($p < 0.01$)[6]. The domains with the highest correlation are economic confidence (0.341) and values and meaning (0.313). This level of correlation is usually considered moderate. In contrast, the correlations with the domains of agency, social connections and health are low to moderate.

Table 5.3: Pearson correlation inner wellbeing and happiness

We then wished to assess the relative effect of the different domains on happiness, when all of the domains were taken into account together. We therefore undertook linear regression analysis with happiness as the dependent variable and the IWB domains as the independent variables. As before, it is important to be clear that we do not envisage IWB domains as either determinants or components of SWB. Rather, we simply wanted to assess whether the degree of overlap for some domains and global happiness is greater than for other domains, when all the domains together are taken into account. As Table 5.4 shows, when all of the IWB domains are entered into the analysis together, the domain of economic confidence

remains the most strongly related with happiness, closely followed by values and meaning. The domain of health also shows a statistically significant relationship with happiness. In other words, in this sample greater overall happiness is most strongly related with economic confidence, followed by the sense of values and meaning and physical and mental health. Relationships between happiness and the other domains were not significant. The R-squared score indicates that IWB helps to explain 18 per cent of the variability of the happiness of participants.

Table 5.4: Linear regression analysis of happiness over inner wellbeing

Having considered the relationship between happiness and the way people felt about their economic positions, we then wanted to explore whether there was any association between IWB and their 'objective' economic status. We constructed two indicators of economic status. The first, to give a proxy for income, combined a five-fold categorisation of people's main source of livelihood with the amount of maize they harvested.[7] Maize is the staple crop in Chiawa, and using it in this way to moderate the category of main source of livelihood enabled us to distinguish, for example, between very poor and more wealthy farmers who would otherwise have appeared in the same category. The second indicator, to give a proxy for wealth, was formed through Principal Components Analysis (PCA) on the variables of housing, source of electricity, type of cooking fuel, and assets (farm animals, transport, technology).[8]

Having produced these proxies for wealth and income we undertook similar analyses as before. First, we tested for correlations between the measures of economic status and the IWB domains. The results are presented in Table 5.5. This shows that almost all of the domains have positive and significant correlations with both

economic status indicators. The one exception is a lack of relationship between wealth and health. The size of the correlations ranges from moderate to low.

Table 5.5: Correlation of economic status indicators and IWB domains

Finally, we wished to explore the relationship between objective economic status, inner wellbeing and happiness, after controlling for other personal characteristics of participants such as age, gender, marital status, and years of education. Table 5.6 presents the results. This shows that the livelihood variable loses much of its significance once the control factors are introduced, while the significance of wealth remains. This could suggest that personal characteristics such as age, education and marital status are driving much of the variability captured by the livelihood variable. The most significant finding is, however, that the influence of economic status on people's inner wellbeing goes beyond their economic confidence, significantly predicting their wellbeing outcomes in almost all domains such as their sense of agency and participation, competence and self-worth, values and meaning, and the perceived quality of their social connections. As with the two previous tables, the domain of health is the only one not significantly associated with wealth, though it does show marginal significance ($p = <0.1$) with livelihood. Overall, the R-square values show that happiness is the subjective variable least explained by this model, at under 10 per cent. This is in line with the wider findings discussed above.

Dwarfing the effect of all other variables is the fact of being a woman heading a household alone. This is captured in the dummy variable Unmarried. Because of the way we constructed our sample of married couples and single women, this variable mainly reflects the gendered effect of being a single, divorced or widowed woman.[9] For economic confidence, this is significant at $p = <0.01$, with a coefficient of -0.368. The next highest effect is again negative, and again for single women, in relation to

health (-0.249 at p = <0.05). No other coefficient is above 0.2 and most cluster around 0.1 or below. This result does not undermine the significance of economic factors, but demonstrates how they can be compounded by other social dimensions. Results not reported here showed that single women were significantly poorer than married people (Baertl-Helguero *et al.* 2014). This dummy variable thus captures the mutli-dimensional social and economic marginality experienced by women heading households alone.

Table 5.6: Regressions of IWB domains over economic status and control variables

In sum, then, the statistical analysis strongly supports the contention that economic concerns have a major effect on subjective dimensions of wellbeing beyond economic confidence itself. Within the subjective, it is people's economic confidence that has the strongest association with how happy they say themselves to be. In turn, proxies for objective wealth and income are significant predictors of inner wellbeing – and indeed happiness – with wealth having by far the greater effect once other control variables are introduced. The strongest effect of economic status is on economic confidence, which in turn we have seen to be the domain which correlates most strongly with happiness. However, the effect of economic status stretches beyond economic confidence into almost all other domains of inner wellbeing. This seems to suggest that pursuing a multi-domain approach to subjective dimensions of wellbeing can capture better the effects of various 'objective' factors on how people are thinking and feeling about different aspects of their lives than depending on a single happiness item.

[A] Re-thinking Economics and Subjectivities: Qualitative Perspectives

Our statistical results demonstrate the great importance of economics to subjective dimensions of wellbeing, but they cannot tell us *how* this importance is configured. The whole logic of the tests we have undertaken assumes an external, causative relationship between an 'independent' and 'dependent' variable (see also Ramirez forthcoming). This is the kind of relationship that often appears as the 'social determinants of' health or wellbeing.

Our qualitative data, however, suggest a rather different kind of relationship, one that is more internal and constitutive, with economic identities implicated in the production of the self. This resonates with the theorising of WeD mentioned above, that wellbeing is comprised of intertwined material, relational, and subjective dimensions.

There is not space within this chapter to develop the argument in detail, but we present three snapshots that may take it some way forward. The first is the way that notions of love and material provision are intertwined within (male) gendered identities around 'taking care.' The second is the centrality of reciprocity and the sense of a *moral* economy. The third is the suggestion that people use economics as an expressive idiom in talking about the self.

[B] Gendered identities in 'Taking Care' – Love and Provision

The notion of 'taking care' is a very powerful one in Chiawa. It arises most immediately in the context of parental and marital relationships, but extends into broader, mainly but not exclusively kin-related, responsibilities. Being the provider,

the one who ‘takes care’ is particularly central to adult male gender identities. Consider how this man describes how his moral and social identity is built through his giving of care to his family:

> I am taking care of my wife; I am taking care of my son; and also I am taking care of my mother; my own brothers and sisters who are in the village. I buy my mum some clothes, some blankets, I also send some money there and even there in the village most people really seek to say that ‘this mother’s son is taking good care of her. He must be a loving and caring son’. So I do take care of my mother and my brothers and sisters and also of my wife and my own son. At least other people are able to tell themselves that this person is a ‘father’ to his family (MM 145).

Iris, whose husband’s poor mental health meant he had been unable to provide for her or their children, similarly chose to emphasise a man’s duties as the way things ought to be:

> What I can say for somebody to be living a good life is when one is in a marriage; first of all, your husband must stand up and say ‘I have a wife whom I need to take care of.’ Second also, one must be ready to bear responsibilities on his children. Also one must be ready to send his children to school so that if things fail you can say that things failed because of this reason, it’s not that you neglected them. I am also saying things might be different on how people view it from the community and I don’t know how they view it but the way I see things someone must really love and appreciate what he has in his life (MW 90).

While this could be read as quite a conventional patriarchal script, in the context of the interview as a whole it becomes clear that this would over-simplify. Her husband's mental illness had meant that Iris had to take on all the responsibility for running the household, and within her means she was ably providing for herself and her children. Her statement here thus stands as part resistance and critique, part grief and longing for the more supportive relationship she would have liked to have.

Beyond Iris's personal circumstances, however, her statement also signifies how marriage – especially when 'in the home you don't fight' – is central to understandings of wellbeing in Chiawa. Here again the relationship is seen in active voice, it is not something inert or static but realised through the mutual giving and receiving of care. This association of marriage with wellbeing has material dimensions. As mentioned above, as a group, single women are doing worse than married people on virtually every economic indicator. In life history interviews single women also talked a great deal about the social marginality that they felt, experiencing suspicion and hostility from married women and sexual predation from married men. Interestingly, the issue of 'taking care' was a strong theme in single women's explanations of both why they might, and why they would not, seek to marry again. While some hoped for a new husband who would look after themselves and their children, a larger number stated that they would not re-marry, in the belief that another man would never take care of their children as his own.

[B] Reciprocities and Moral Economy

The emphasis on taking care is part of a broader vision of a moral economy. People did not envisage themselves, for the most part, as self-interested, individual rational economic actors. Rather, the purpose of wealth was not to accumulate as an individual, but to provide for and share with others. While caring for one's immediate

family might be common across most, if not all, human societies, the web of care that people envisaged in Chiawa stretched far more widely. As one man powerfully summed up:

> Well, if one is to live a good life in our community…I think first of all one must have enough food for his family… for himself and his family. And must also have something to share with the community, because like you don't just say, "No, this is for my family alone", but you've also got some other relatives, some friends who can come and ask for things (MM 54).

The modal form of exchange, therefore, is not the market transaction, but the gift. This is not to romanticise economic relationships, or to suggest that Chiawa operates as a 'traditional', pre-capitalist economy. Rather, the point is that the primary emphasis remains on the relationship between people, instead of, as in neo-classical understandings of the economic subject, between people and things. As economic anthropology has argued, however, there is within gift-giving a 'euphemized' (Bourdieu 1977) transactional element which is hidden by the passing of time between gift and return. In Chiawa, this intervening period may be extraordinarily extended – one man told us how as a child he lived for ten years with an uncle to fulfil a deal made with his father years before his birth.

A critical aspect of this moral economy is the sense of generalised reciprocity – that what goes around, comes around. Within this the material and the relational are again closely intertwined. The following statement expresses this well:

> By helping both the sides I was not looking at my direct personal benefit because they being relatives, I felt maybe at one point that you never know who is going to help whom; because maybe if I helped my relatives maybe at some point they also help me or my children, or maybe their children who

> help my children. My wife's relatives also look at me as being a good person. Also, you never know who is going to be helped between my children and them (MM 132).

This statement mixes together moral action and self-interest, in a way that emphasises the voluntary nature of participation, and thus re-inscribes the speaker's agency in his conformity. Other statements, however, bring out some of the tensions between the moral injunction to 'take care' and the material capacity to do so. The statement below was given in the context of describing how it is determined who will take on responsibility for children after their parents have died. In theory at least, moral considerations should trump material ones. When the elders sit to decide who should take the place of the mother or father, they consider the personal qualities of the individual, not his or her material circumstances. The critical thing is to be (seen to be) someone with a heart for others. In straitened times this can set up a real tension between moral and relational considerations on the one hand and financial capacity on the other. The sense of tension between what is felt inside and what it is felt possible to express socially is palpable:

> It is quite tricky in the sense that support becomes difficult even if you have one child you are taking care of especially looking at the economic situation especially here in Chiawa. And then eventually you are not prepared, you are given these children so somehow it becomes difficult although we say it is easy. It is quite difficult to say it is difficult because you feel people might say that you don't want to look after the children so even though the difficulty is there you say it's ok because you want to let people see that you want to keep the children but inwardly you feel that you can't look after the children (MM 124).

[B] Economics as an Expressive Idiom

We mentioned above the way that people would often respond in terms of their economic circumstances to questions we had intended to capture their social relationships or self-worth. This tendency to speak of the self in economic terms was evident in qualitative interviews also. One explanation might be that people were producing themselves as 'poor', in response to their perception of our identities as rich potential sponsors or donors. There is no doubt that many people did indeed see us in this way. However, the predominance of economic references spread far beyond such contexts. Consider the following two descriptions by older, now single, women of their marriages. In the first case Gertrude is reminiscing about her early days of marriage and the happiness she experienced.

> G: At that time [my husband] would go away [to work] for maybe a month without returning home.
>
> Shreya: And you would be alone all through this time?
>
> G: Yes.
>
> S: How did that make you feel?
>
> G: I was happy because I knew that he was out there looking for money that was going to help us (SW 38).

The second woman, Hattie, is describing how she divorced her husband after being unhappily married for many years:

Shreya: Okay… you had divorced him. Was it easy to take that decision?

H: It wasn't hard for me to take the dowry back because I had played through thick and thin through good 16 years. I didn't even have a chitenge[10]; I would do piece work for me to get one. I just started living on piecework as (if) I had no husband until it just came to my mind after 16 years 'this is too much and I cannot withstand it any longer'. So I decided to do that and drop him (SW 39).

In each of these interviews the experience has been described in emotional terms and in each the context (early married life, the breakdown of a marriage) would seem to lend itself to a psychological or emotional reflection. When the interviewer seeks to explore this further, however, the respondents take an unexpected turn: they foreground the economic aspect of their subjectivity, rather than the affective.

There are a number of possible ways to interpret this. As mentioned above, in line with Maslow (1954), it could be that these women were simply so poor that the material and economic inscribed the horizon of their worlds. Alternatively, it could be that people in such contexts are simply unused to speaking directly of their feelings, and/or that norms of propriety, self-deprecation, or a wish to retain privacy made them unwilling to speak in a more intimate way. To resolve these questions would require more detailed research. It is worth noting, however, that both these potential explanations locate the constraint within the Chiawa context.

There are two alternatives, which problematise instead our initial point of entry.

First, within social psychology there is a syndrome called the 'fundamental attribution error' (Ross 1977). This refers to the tendency to over-attribute others' behaviour to their personal intentions or character, rather than recognise the

situational factors that might be responsible. This is in contrast to the tendency to emphasise external factors when explaining one's own behaviour. For example, when other people arrive late for a meeting people attribute it to their lack of concern for others, but when they are late themselves they blame the traffic. Miller (1984) found that this tendency was not evident in her studies in India, suggesting that the error may be characteristic of cultural settings that emphasise individualism rather than others. This opens the possibility that the psychological subject of subjective wellbeing might be an aspect of a Western 'culture-based syndrome'[11]: an over-emphasis on the individual and mental leading to an under-evaluation of the material and situational dimensions of life.

Second, Scheper-Hughes (1992: 185-6) emphasises that for people 'who live by and through their bodies in manual and wage labour', 'socioeconomic and political contradictions often take shape in the "natural" contradictions of sick and afflicted bodies.' Following Boltanski (1984), she contrasts this with the fact that 'In the middle classes personal and social distress is expressed psychologically rather than physically, and the language of the body is silenced and denied.' It is this middle-class idiom that has been normalised within bio-medicine, psychiatry, and anthropology, labelling as 'somatization', the manifestation of social ills in bodily dysfunction, which is seen as an indirect, more primitive means of expression. While this paper has concentrated on the way people in Chiawa talk of their economic circumstances rather than their bodies, the materiality that is common across the two cases again gives pause for thought about the biases 'we' bring to the field, assuming that a psychological form of expression constitutes the norm.

[A] Conclusion

For these communities in Chiawa where material hardship is common, economics provides a primary reference point when people talk about wellbeing. This is evident in the ways that people respond when asked what wellbeing means to them. Beyond this, however, economic capacity (or the lack of it), economic provision (or the lack of it) and economic endeavours are mentioned frequently even when the topic of conversation apparently relates to some quite different sphere of life. This seems, then, to confirm the findings of the literature on economics and subjective wellbeing, that for poorer people their economic status is a strong predictor of how they evaluate their lives. Our statistical analysis reinforced this. Across the sample as a whole, we found that amongst the inner wellbeing domains, economic confidence had the strongest association with happiness. The analysis also showed that objective economic capacity had a significant effect on both inner wellbeing and happiness, even when other demographic variables were taken into account.

The main purpose of this chapter, however, is to re-focus from this familiar argument over numbers, to consider the kind of *subjects* that are being presented. Our suggestion is that in Chiawa at least, people often express their subjectivities in economic terms. This is in marked contrast to the rather disembodied, psychological subject generally assumed in psychological and subjective wellbeing discourses.

Mixed methods were used to explore economic subjectivities. Quantitative and qualitative data and analysis were found to strongly reinforce one another, both pointing to the importance of economic capacity to subjective dimensions of wellbeing. This overall congruence notwithstanding, the ways that qualitative and quantitative methods represented the relationship between economics and subjective dimensions of wellbeing were quite distinct. While the statistical analysis has the strength of being able to quantify results across the whole sample, it also has the weakness of having to construct relationships in external terms. As argued in chapter one, its tendency is to objectify. The qualitative analysis is weaker in being

grounded in the experience of particular individuals rather than the group as a whole, but is stronger in being more sensitive to the ways that people seek to express themselves and how they understand their lives. This again emphasises the economic, but suggests that it cannot be separated out as *an external influence on* wellbeing, but rather is integral to people's understanding of relationality and personhood, a key element in the constitution of wellbeing itself.

In terms of policy and practice, the clear implication is that a commitment to basic economic and social rights should remain at the heart of development intervention. But it does not imply surrender to analytical approaches which would privilege a narrow understanding of the economic as simply concerned with the market or the 'rational' allocation of scarce resources amongst individualised actors. Rather, it suggests that we should follow economic anthropology and the nascent anthropological literature on happiness and wellbeing within Africa to bring economics, the body, the mind and materiality more clearly into the social world. We close with two examples of this. In the first place, Jackson (2011: 59) describes how not having enough to eat is linked for the Kuranko in Sierra Leone to moral and ethical breakdown:

> Without rice, people say, they starve. But hunger is also a metaphor. First, it is a metaphor for what is most difficult in life, and for the tenacity and strength of suffering. Hence the ironic response to the question "Are you well?"… "I am as well as hunger", meaning I am *very* hale and hearty. Second, the hungry time signifies any situation in which generosity goes by the board. It suggests an ethically compromised situation, characterized by self-interestedness and regressive behavior, when adults behave like children.

In the second place, James Ferguson (2006: 72) describes on a broader canvas the intertwining of moral and material, economic and social:

the production of wealth throughout wide areas of southern and central Africa is understood to be inseparable from the production of social relations. Production of wealth can be understood as pro-social, morally valuable “work,” ‘producing oneself by producing people, relations, and things’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 143). Alternatively it can be understood as anti-social, morally illegitimate appropriation that is exploitative and destructive of community.

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[A] Notes

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[2] This is the title of a chapter in Graham (2012) for example.

[3] Further details on the Factor Analysis procedures followed are available from Viviana Ramirez on request.

[4] The domain scores were calculated through a regression method, that weighted each item according to the strength with which it loaded onto the factor in the factor analysis.

[5] See Ramirez (forthcoming) for a similar analysis with data from two communities in Mexico.

[6] This means that there is less than a 1 per cent chance that this association has occurred by chance.

[7] For details on this categorisation, see Baertl Helguero, White and Jha (2014:37)

[8] For more details on the types of assets see Baertl Helguero, White and Jha (2014:35)

[9] This variable also reflects a very few unmarried men, who had been divorced or widowed since the first round of our survey in 2010.

[10] Wrap that women wear over their skirt or trousers.

[11] This term is used within medical anthropology to describe disorders which are recognised in particular local contexts but cannot easily be translated into Western bio-medical categories.

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Table 5.1: Items from EFA that Measured Six Domains of Inner Wellbeing

Economic confidence
1. How well would you say you are managing economically at present?
2. If guests come do you feel you can look after them in the proper way?
3. Do you feel that people around you have got ahead of you?
4. How well could you manage if something bad were to happen (e.g. illness in the family)?
Agency & Participation
1. If there is a village meeting do you have an opportunity to voice your opinion?
2. If official decisions are made that affect you badly, do you feel that you have power to change them?
3. Do feel that you are heard? (Beyond family)
Social Connections
1. Do you know the kind of people who can help you get things done?
2. When do you get to hear about events in the community?
3. Do you feel there are people beyond your immediate family who you'll be able to count on even through bad times?
4. What proportion of people in the community are helpful (to you)?
Health
1. Do you ever have trouble sleeping?
2. How often do you feel too weak for what you need to do?
3. Do you suffer from tension?
Competence & Self-worth
1. How far do you feel you are able to help other people?
2. To what extent do you have faith in yourself?
3. To what extent do you tend to doubt the decisions that you have made?
Values & Meaning
1. To what extent do you feel that life has been fair for you?
2. How far would you say you feel peace in your heart at the end of the day?
3. To what extent do you feel that life has been good to you?

Table 5.2 Descriptive Statistics: Happiness and IWB

	Mean	Std. Dev
SWB		
Happiness	3.50	0.932
IWB		
Economic Confidence	2.82	0.686
Agency and Participation	2.65	0.770
Social Connections	2.67	0.720
Physical and Mental Health	3.09	0.732
Competence and Self-worth	3.26	0.689
Values and Meaning	2.96	0.709

Table 5.3. Pearson correlation Inner wellbeing and happiness

IWB	Happiness
Economic Confidence	0.341**
Agency and Participation	0.187**
Social Connections	0.174**
Physical and Mental Health	0.176**
Competence and Self-worth	0.210**
Values and Meaning	0.313**

** p-value < 0.001, * p-value < 0.05

Table 5.4 Linear Regression analysis of Happiness over Inner Wellbeing

	Happiness
Constant	1.068**
Economic Confidence	0.292**
Agency and Participation	0.041
Social Connections	0.019
Physical and Mental Health	0.137*
Competence and Self-worth	0.101
Values and Meaning	0.235**
R-squared	0.176

** p-value < 0.001, * p-value < 0.05

Table 5.5 Correlation of economic status indicators and IWB domains

	Livelihood	Wealth
Economic Confidence	0.255**	.418**
Agency and Participation	0.267**	.271**
Social Connections	0.202**	.302**
Physical and Mental Health	0.188**	0.080
Competence and Self-worth	0.230**	.240**
Values and Meaning	0.225**	.305**

** p < 0.001, * p < 0.05

Table 5.6 Regressions of IWB Domains over Economic Status and Control Variables

	Economic	Agency	Social	Health	Self-worth	Values	Happiness
Wealth	0.142**	0.107**	0.099**	-0.014	0.085**	0.128**	0.105**
Livelihood	0.058†	0.075†	0.045	0.075†	0.081*	0.077*	0.076
Controls							
Male	-0.024	0.061	0.023	0.113	0.126	-0.077	-0.03515
Age	-0.007*	0.014**	-0.001	-0.011**	0.006	0.004	-0.004
Years of education	0.019†	0.033*	0.027*	0.017	0.009	0.031*	0.033*
Unmarried	-0.368**	-0.159	-0.158	-0.249*	-0.039	0.088	-0.100
Remarried	-0.125	-0.176†	-0.102	-0.065	-0.012	0.065	0.010
Household size	0.012	0.012	0.011	0.003	0.018	0.004	0.006
Constant	2.423**	1.343**	2.117**	3.259**	2.355**	2.035**	2.939**
R-squared	0.269	0.178	0.126	0.102	0.114	0.131	0.095

** p-value < 0.01, * p-value < 0.05, † p-value < 0.1